

## PLANNING BOARD & PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Fiscal Year 2004

The Amherst Planning Board and Planning Department engaged in the following land use, planning and zoning activities during Fiscal Year 2004.

### CURRENT PLANNING

Commercial and especially residential development issues and applications occupied much of the time of the Board and Department during FY 04.

Table 1 provides a statistical review of the Department's activities, including the various permits it oversees, and zoning and other regulatory changes.

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**Table 1**  
**Planning Board**  
**Land Use & Zoning Activity**

<u>A.</u>	<u>Review &amp; Action</u>	<u># of Applications</u>
1.	Planning Board Special Permits	2
2.	Form A (Approval Not Required) Subdivisions	19
3.	Cluster Subdivision	1
4.	Standard Subdivision	4
5.	Subdivision Lot Releases	7
6.	Subdivision/Site Plan Escrow Releases	6
7.	Street Name Changes	0
8.	Development Authorization Requests	3
9.	Site Plan Review Requests	7
10.	Sign Plans Approved	1
11.	Lighting Plans Approved	0
12.	Scenic Road Requests	2
13.	Ch. 61A Removal Requests	4
<u>B.</u>	<u>Review &amp; Recommendation</u>	
1.	Zoning Amendments	9
2.	Rules & Regulations Amendments	3
3.	Special Permits/Variations	35
4.	Street Acceptances	2

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What follows is a summary of some of the more significant development proposals and issues during FY 04:

### **Commercial/Institutional**

- \* A revised plan for a mixed use commercial/residential building at 213 College Street
- \* Redesign of the Plum Brook Recreation Area to accommodate additional playing fields
- \* Expansion of the commercial building for Andrew's Greenhouse at 1178 South East Street
- \* Conversion of the former Common School building at 611 Belchertown Road to serve as the new site of the Amherst Chinese Christian Church
- \* Renovation of the former "Rusty Scupper" and "Season's" restaurant buildings (farmhouse and barn) at 529 Belchertown Road to serve as a new winery
- \* New outdoor dining and a dining canopy for "Bueno Y Sano," an established Boltwood Walk restaurant
- \* Planting plan for a new commercial addition at the rear of 71 North Pleasant Street
- \* Renovations to a canopy structure at the Atkins Farm Market.

### **Residential**

- \* Review and approval of final revised plans for the 12-lot, 16-unit Palley Village cluster development off Old Belchertown Road
- \* Review and approval of the 20-unit Sunwood Pines, Amherst's first Open Space Community Development (OSCD)
- \* Preliminary and definitive approval for Moody Fields, a 7 lot single family subdivision off of Snell Street
- \* Lot Releases for home building in Barkowski Meadows, Hop Brook Road and Kestrel Lane (The Meadows).

### **Zoning Issues**

- \* Developed revisions to the Zoning Map in response to requests from residents of single-family homes on East Pleasant Street, changing their properties from Fraternity Residence (R-F) to Neighborhood residence (R-N). Adopted by the Fall 2003 Special Town Meeting.
- \* Continued to consider amendments to the regulations governing office uses in the professional Research Park (PRP) District.

- \* Considered a rezoning request by Janyce Wziontka, the owner of properties at the southwest corner of Northampton Road (Rte. 9) and Snell Street, who proposed that her properties be changed from Professional Research Park (PRP) to Limited Business (B-L). Referred back to the Planning Board by the 2004 Annual Town Meeting.
- \* Responded to a citizen petition (O'Connor) proposing an 18-month moratorium on the construction of homes over 4,000 square feet in area. The article was withdrawn prior to 2004 Annual Town Meeting.
- \* Responded to a citizen petition (O'Connor) seeking to amend sections of the Zoning Bylaw dealing with converted dwellings. At the Board's request, the article was referred back to the Planning Board by the 2004 Annual Town Meeting.
- \* Responded to a citizen petition (O'Connor) seeking to change the way in which wetlands are factored into residential density calculations for development. At the Board's recommendation, the 2004 Town Meeting adopted an amended definition included in the article, and defeated the remaining sections.

## **COMPREHENSIVE/COMMUNITY PLANNING**

Efforts continued on a number of long-range planning issues, while new issues and projects also involved the time and attention of the Board and Department.

### **Mt. Tom/Mt. Holyoke**

As part of a coalition of other cities and towns containing some portion of the Mt. Holyoke Range, Amherst participated in a regional approach to protecting the Mt. Tom and Mt. Holyoke ranges, including the exploration of coordinated land use regulations governing development on the Range.

Mr. Bob Grose served as the Planning Board representative to the Summit Land Use Task Force. Planning Director Bob Mitchell was the Town's staff liaison to the Task Force.

### **Comprehensive Plan**

Planning Department staff continued to provide the Comprehensive Planning Committee with assistance in pursuing a comprehensive plan for Amherst. The implications of the 2003 Build-Out & Future Growth Scenario report for the Town were publicized and explored.

### **Executive Order 418**

Using \$30,000 in state grant funds, the Planning Department worked with other Town departments, boards and committees, and consultants to complete a number of studies related to comprehensive planning:

\* 2003 Affordable Housing Plan

This update of the 1992 Fair Housing Plan was completed with Land Use Inc. assisting the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee (HP/FHC).

\* Open Space Plan Update

The Conservation Department completed and received conditional state approval for a draft update of the Town's Open Space Plan. The GIS maps accompanying the Plan were prepared by Dodson & Associates with coordination by the Planning Department.

\* University Drive Corridor Traffic Study

Working with consulting engineers Dufresne-Henry, Inc., the Public Works Department conducted a traffic study of the University Drive corridor, including traffic counts, turning movements, and pedestrian/automobile conflicts. This study will be used to inform road infrastructure improvement planning for the area.

### **Downtown**

The Town continued the reconstruction of downtown sidewalks. With design assistance from Associate Planner Christine Brestrup (landscape architect), the paving pattern for sidewalk travel corridors was reworked in response to citizen concerns. Christine incorporated the resulting paving pattern and other landscape improvements into a design for improvement of "Pleasant Walk," the former driveway next to Starbuck's Coffee, which was completed by the Town's Department of Public Works. This new pedestrian walk connects the interior of Boltwood Walk (Bangs Center, parking garage) with the North Pleasant Street shops and sidewalk corridor.

Design work continued for downtown streetscape improvements in the downtown, as the community continued to consider and debate how best to pay for those improvements.

The Planning Board met with Amherst College representatives to review and comment on proposed changes in parking and crosswalks on and near the campus.

### **Housing**

In addition to the 2003 Affordable Housing Plan update, the Town continued its discussions with the University of Massachusetts about mutual housing interests.

Working with the Amherst Housing Authority and the Community Preservation Act Committee, the HP/FHC recommended a number of measures to protect existing affordable housing units and to provide for the creation of new affordable units. The HP/FHC met with the Planning Board's Zoning Subcommittee to discuss significant amendments to the Zoning Bylaw to mandate and encourage affordability in new residential development.

The affordable housing restriction was completed on 4 units (two duplexes) of affordable housing in the Palley Village cluster development off Old Belchertown Road.

### **Historic Preservation**

Work continued on the Amherst Preservation Plan, the historic preservation component of a community master plan, with Planning staff and the Historical Commission working with consultants Martha Lyon and William Geizentanner. Funding for the Plan was made available through a \$20,000 Community Preservation Act appropriation. The public participation component of the Plan's development included two major community forums, a survey, and extensive interviews. Completion of the Plan is slated for FY 05.

The Historical Commission conducted an extensive, successful community fundraising effort, raising nearly \$40,000 to underwrite the cost of the proposed West Cemetery Mural to be installed on the east (rear) wall of the Carriage Shops. An easement for installation and maintenance of the mural was donated by property trust owners Richard Johnson, Jerald Gates, and Robert Ritchie. Installation of the mural by Cambridge muralist David Fichter is slated to begin in fall 2004.

### **Atkins Corner**

In October 2003, the Planning Department received an Outstanding Planning award from the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association for the Sustainable Village Center Plan for Atkins Corner, a community planning effort which had been conducted by former Senior Planner Constance Kruger and Associate Planner Niels la Cour. Using the Atkins Corner Plan as guidance, the Planning Department and DPW worked with Congressman Olver's office and MassHighway to obtain funds for the redesign of the road system. Funding was approved at the end of the year, and planning began for the hiring of engineers to design the new West Street/Bay Road intersection and roadways improvements.

## **STAFF ASSISTANCE**

Planning Department staff provide support and assistance to a multitude of Town boards and committees, as well as other local and regional boards. The Town boards and committees that the Planning Department is "officially" assigned to in FY 04 included:

- ❖ Planning Board
- ❖ Zoning Subcommittee
- ❖ Atkins Corner Working Group
- ❖ Design Review Board
- ❖ Zoning Board of Appeals
- ❖ Town/Commercial Relations Committee
- ❖ Historical Commission
- ❖ Comprehensive Planning Committee
- ❖ Redevelopment Authority

- ❖ Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee
- ❖ Economic Development and Industrial Corporation
- ❖ Overall Economic Development Planning Committee
- ❖ GIS Committee
- ❖ UMass Campus Planning Committee.

Other committees for whom the Planning staff provide assistance include:

- ❖ Public Transportation Committee & Bicycle Subcommittee
- ❖ Disabilities Access Advisory Committee
- ❖ Parking Commission
- ❖ Public Art Commission
- ❖ Community Preservation Act Committee
- ❖ Public Shade Tree Committee
- ❖ Greater Franklin County Economic Development Strategy Committee
- ❖ Regional Local Partnership Committee
- ❖ Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
- ❖ Massachusetts Geographic Information Council
- ❖ Summit Land Use Task Force
- ❖ Amherst Energy Task Force.

## **PLANNING BOARD & STAFF**

During FY 04, new members Christopher Boyd and Elizabeth Hyman were appointed to the Board. Long-time members (6 years) Sara Berger, Bob Grose, and Frank McNerney completed their terms.

Planning Board members took advantage of training opportunities, attending training sessions on planning, zoning, and development ethics sponsored by the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative, and participating in audio conferences sponsored by the American Planning Association (APA). The Planning Board also received training from Town Counsel Alan Seewald and Planning Director Bob Mitchell.

Intern James Errickson, a graduate student in planning at the University of Massachusetts, was hired.

At the end of the year, the Planning Board consisted of: Paul Bobrowski, Chair; Aaron Hayden, Vice-Chair; Pamela Rooney, Clerk; Sara Berger, Christopher Boyd, Adrian Fabos, Aaron Hayden, Elizabeth Hyman, and David Kastor.

At the very end of the year, the Planning Department underwent a major change. On June 30, 2004, Planning Director Robert Mitchell, who had led the Department since December 1984, resigned to assume the position of Special Assistant for Sustainable Development with the newly created Office for Commonwealth Development in the Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD). Senior Planner Jonathan Tucker assumed the role of Interim Director. Other Planning Department staff included

Associate Planners Niels la Cour and Christine Brestrup, and Management Assistant Sue Krzanowski.

*Paul Bobrowski*  
Chair

*Jonathan Tucker*  
Interim Planning Director